

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

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1. A system for use in distributed computing, comprising:

10 a task server configured to keep track of information associated with each of a multiplicity of client computers and to use the information to assign one or more tasks associated with a computing problem to each client computer;

a file server configured to provide application modules to the client computers for executing their assigned tasks; and

15 an application server configured to provide input data for the application modules to the client computers and to receive output data of the application modules from the client computers.

20 2. A system in accordance with claim 1, wherein the application modules are configured to be executable by a universal client program.

25 3. A system in accordance with claim 2, wherein the file server is further configured to provide the universal client program to the client computers

4. A system in accordance with claim 1, wherein the information comprises user identification information.

30 5. A system in accordance with claim 1, wherein the information comprises a unique machine identification number for each client computer.

6. A system in accordance with claim 1, wherein the information comprises status information for tasks being executed on client computers.

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7. A method for use in a distributed computing system, comprising the steps of:

providing a client program for installation on a client computer;

10 receiving, through a computer network, information associated with the client computer that is collected by the client program installed on the client computer;

using the information to assign one or more tasks associated with a computing problem to the client computer; and

15 providing one or more application modules to the client computer for executing its assigned tasks, wherein the application modules are executable by the client program and are provided through the computer network.

20 8. A method in accordance with claim 7, wherein the steps of receiving and using are performed by a first server, and the step of providing is performed by a second server.

25 9. A method in accordance with claim 7, wherein the information comprises machine identification information.

10. A method in accordance with claim 7, wherein the information comprises processor information.

30 11. A method in accordance with claim 7, wherein the information comprises memory information.

12. A method in accordance with claim 7, further comprising the step of:

receiving team identification information from the client  
5 computer through the computer network;

13. A method in accordance with claim 7, further comprising the step of:

receiving performance information from the client  
10 computer through the computer network;

14. A method in accordance with claim 13, further comprising the step of:

adding the performance information to additional  
15 performance information for a team of client computers with which the client computer is associated.

15. A method for use in a distributed computing system, comprising the steps of:

20 sending a request for a new task through a computer network to a first server, the request including user identification information;

receiving module information from the first server through the computer network in response to the request, the  
25 module information including locator information for a second server in the computer network where a module can be obtained;

redirecting to the second server using the locator information; and

receiving the module from the second server through  
30 the computer network.

16. A method in accordance with claim 15, wherein the module information is based at least in part on the user identification information.

5 17. A method in accordance with claim 15, wherein the request further comprises machine identification information.

10 18. A method in accordance with claim 15, wherein the module information further comprises module identification information.

15 19. A method in accordance with claim 15, wherein the module information further comprises module version information.

20 20. A method in accordance with claim 19, further comprising the step of:  
deleting an older version of the module.

25 21. A method in accordance with claim 15, wherein the computer network comprises the Internet.

30 22. A method in accordance with claim 15, further comprising the step of:  
starting the module.

23. A method in accordance with claim 15, further comprising the step of:  
receiving a command from the first server through the computer network that suspends execution of the module.

24. A method in accordance with claim 15, further comprising the step of:

receiving a command from the first server through the computer network that terminates execution of the module.

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25. A method in accordance with claim 15, further comprising the step of:

sending status information through the computer network to the first server.

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26. A method in accordance with claim 25, wherein the status information comprises a current state for the module.

27. A method for use in a distributed computing system, comprising the steps of:

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receiving a request for a new task from a client through a computer network, the request including user identification information;

assembling module information in response to the request, the module information including locator information indicating a location in the computer network where a module can be obtained;

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sending the module information to the client through the computer network; and

sending the module to the client through the computer network from the location in the computer network.

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28. A method in accordance with claim 27, wherein the request further comprises machine identification information.

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29. A method in accordance with claim 27, wherein

the module information further comprises module identification information.

5 30. A method in accordance with claim 27, wherein the module information further comprises module version information.

10 31. A method in accordance with claim 27, wherein the step of assembling module information is performed by a task server and the step of sending the module to the client is performed by a separate file server.

15 32. A method in accordance with claim 27, wherein the computer network comprises the Internet.

20 33. A method in accordance with claim 27, further comprising the step of:  
sending a command to the client through the computer network that suspends execution of the module.

25 34. A method in accordance with claim 27, further comprising the step of:  
sending a command to the client through the computer network that terminates execution of the module.

30 35. A method in accordance with claim 27, further comprising the step of:  
receiving status information from the client through the computer network.

36. A method in accordance with claim 35, wherein

the status information comprises a current state for the module.

37. A method of providing status information associated with a distributed computing project, comprising the steps of:

generating a first item of performance information for a first client computer participating in the distributed computing project;

sending the first item of performance information from the first client computer through a computer network to a first server;

receiving a second item of performance information at the first client computer from the first server through the computer network, wherein the second item of performance information is based on the first item of performance information and one or more additional items of performance information from one or more additional client computers participating in the distributed computing project; and

displaying the second item of performance information on the first client computer.

38. A method in accordance with claim 37, wherein the first item of performance information comprises an amount of time that a processor in the first client computer spent on a task for the distributed computing project.

39. A method in accordance with claim 37, wherein the second item of performance information comprises a total amount of time that a team of client computers spent on the distributed computing project.

40. A method in accordance with claim 37, wherein the step of displaying comprises the step of:

displaying a hypertext markup language (HTML) page having the second item of performance information thereon.

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41. A method in accordance with claim 37, further comprising the step of:

displaying a name of a team on the first client computer, wherein the team includes the first client computer and the one or more additional client computers.

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42. A method in accordance with claim 37, further comprising the step of:

displaying the first item of performance information on the first client computer.

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43. A method in accordance with claim 42, further comprising the step of:

displaying a name associated with the first client computer on the first client computer.

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44. A method of providing status information associated with a distributed computing project, comprising the steps of:

receiving, through a computer network, performance information from a plurality of client computers participating in the distributed computing project;

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totaling the performance information for a subset of the plurality of client computers that are members of a first team in order to generate team performance information; and

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sending display data through the computer network to



each of the client computers that are members of the first team, wherein the display data is configured to display status information that includes the team performance information.

5                   45. A method in accordance with claim 44, wherein the team performance information comprises a total amount of time that the first team of client computers spent on the distributed computing project.

10                   46. A method in accordance with claim 44, wherein the display data comprises a hypertext markup language (HTML) page.

15                   47. A method in accordance with claim 44, wherein the display data is further configured to display a name of the first team.

20                   48. A method in accordance with claim 44, wherein the display data is further configured to display performance information for a client computer to which the display data is sent.

25                   49. A method for use in a distributed computing system, comprising the steps of:  
                    offering an incentive for a commitment of computing time from a user's computer in the distributed computing system;  
                    providing a client program to the user for installation on the user's computer;  
                    registering the user's computer as a client in the distributed computing system; and  
30                   providing the incentive to the user.

50. A method in accordance with claim 49, wherein the step of providing a client program to the user comprises the step of:

5 sending the client program through a computer network to the user's computer.

51. A method in accordance with claim 49, wherein the step of registering the user's computer as a client comprises the step of:

10 receiving, through a computer network, information associated with the user's computer that is collected by the client program installed on the user's computer.

52. A method in accordance with claim 49, wherein the incentive comprises shares in a company.

53. A method in accordance with claim 49, wherein the incentive comprises money.

54. A method in accordance with claim 49, wherein the incentive comprises frequent-flyer miles.

55. A method in accordance with claim 49, wherein the step of providing the incentive to the user comprises the step of:

25 providing the incentive to the user upon completion of a committed amount of computing time in the distributed computing system.